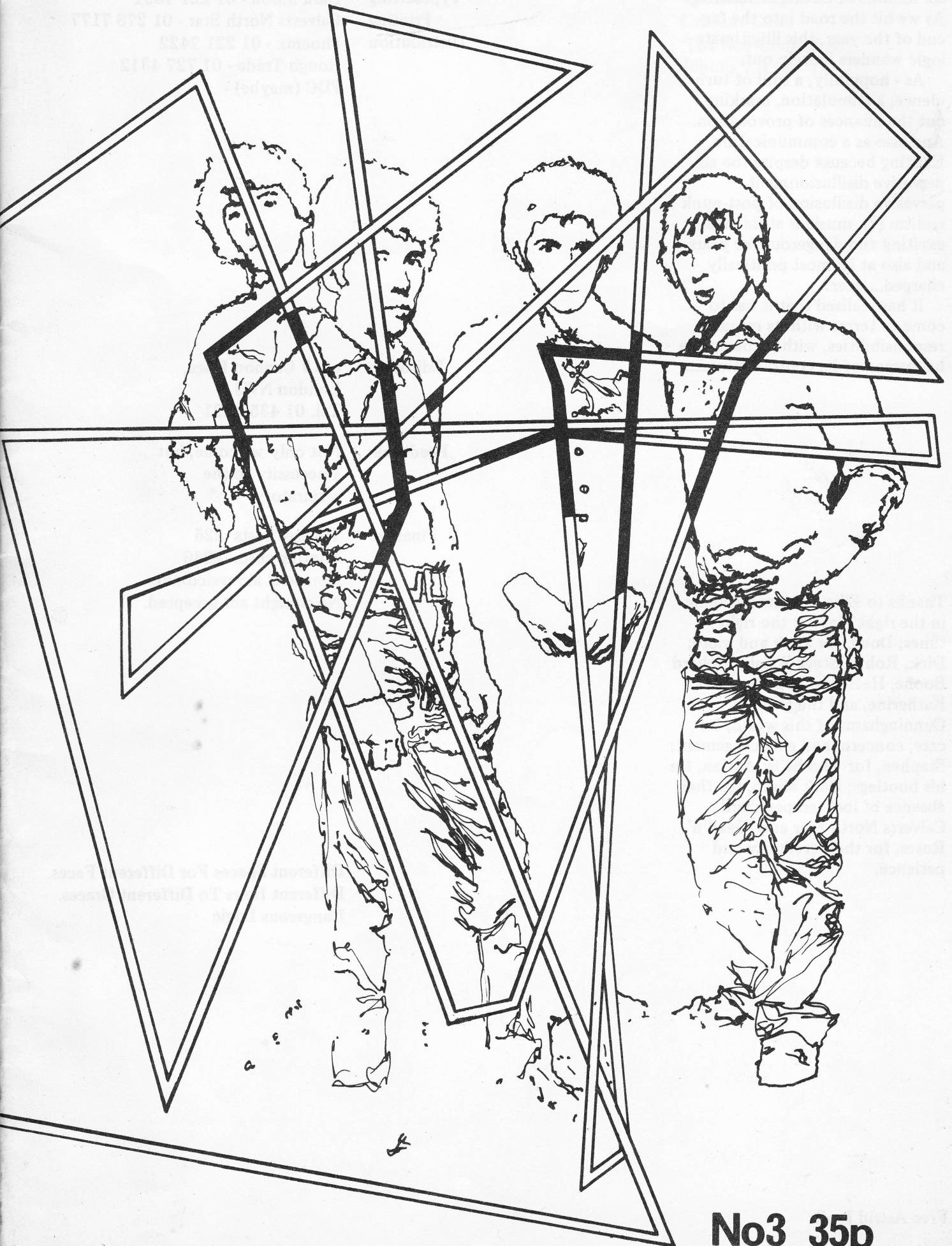


DANGEROUS LOGIC



No3 35p

December 1978

So... another period issue, another six months of hassle, of hustling. As we hit the road into the fag-end of the year, this illegitimate logic wanders loosely out.

As - hopefully, a spill of turbulence, a stimulation, marking out the nuances of provocation. And also as a communication. Existing because despite the all-pervasive disillusionment pervasive disillusion of post-punk realism (?), music is at its most exciting and dangerous for years, and also at its most politically charged... ever?

It has realised that it has to come to terms with its moral responsibilities, with its being the helmsman of its contradictions...

Thanks to Ellie, for almost being in the right place at the right times; Doug, for a job and more; Dick, Robin, Steve Walsh, Richard Boone, Heatoids, Pop Groupers, Katherine, and the David Cunninghams of this world, for care, concern, and encouragement; Stephen, for who he is; Adrian, for his bootlegs; Dark Moon, for their absence of lost tempers; and Calverts North Star and Bread'n' Roses, for their credulity and patience.

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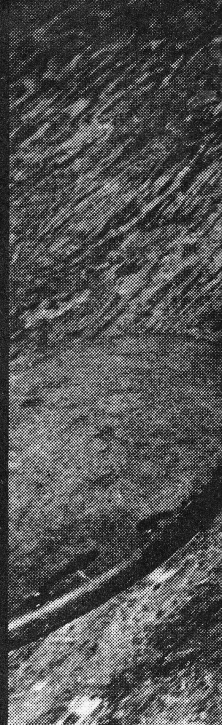
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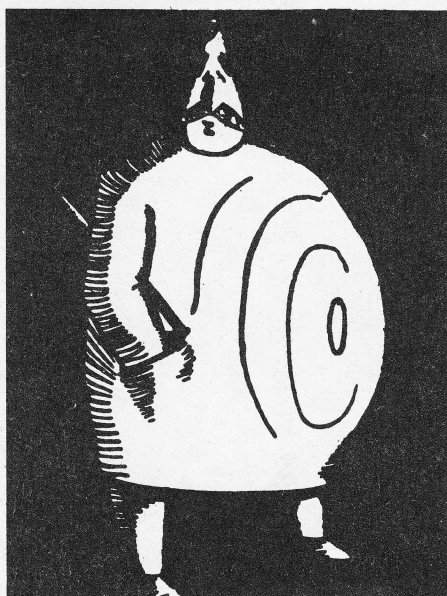
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PERE UBU, THE MODERN DANCE, THE LAST TANGO







With its usual sense of glib assurance the NME recently informed its readership that, 'Pere Ubu, the Avant Garde New Wave Group', would soon be returning to these shores. A redundant (albeit amusing) juxtaposition of images, one might think, but also a warning sign of how the trade will box a group such as Pere Ubu into the nearest shallow convenience available.

David Thomas' definition is different. As Ubu's founder and moving force he sees a group which can and should be considered as a kind of pop group. In the excellent American 'Search and Destroy', he is seen to assert that they are, "totally the same as Wings, the Music Explosion, or The Archies".

Amongst this, one finds my own. Visual rather than verbal, I find it

within one of Mick Milon's photos — on the backside of the album sleeve.

In this one photo Milon captures so much of Pere Ubu's essence. It is not so much an industrial photograph, more it conveys, explodes that peculiar fascination, the continual surrealism, that a working city embodies.

In the top corner a Boeing just after lift off, its body apparently ablaze (caught) with the glint of dusk. Then completely off-scale looming chimneys, rising from the Steel Mills, and a disintegrating body; — imprecise, unsure. .

This is, very much a particular, or maybe even The Modern Dance.

Cleveland was where the photo was taken, and where Pere Ubu come from. Across it stand large billboards announcing the city to its visitors. 'Welcome to Cleveland', they say, 'The Best things in life are here'. Nowhere though do they suggest what those best things are.

Also they do not quote Iggy anywhere, even if Cleveland is nothing if not one of his 'ripped backsides' cities. As it is those adverts were donated, or at least financed, by Republic Steel, which is not really surprising since Cleveland spilling; an overgrown water-shrub; into one of the Great Lakes — Erie Erie — has been shaped both economically and geographically by the Steel industry and all its appendages.

Against such a backdrop, Pere Ubu were first conceived and in the last three years, have since flourished. On their doorstep though, in Cleveland's dives and clubs, they are only just beginning to get beyond the proverbial 'unknown quality' stage. This despite the fact that Cleveland has what Ubu termed an 'outrageous' slice of the rock market, selling (by population) double the national average, and also despite

the fact that Ubu care a lot about the city they come from.

"I've lived there for the last ten years. When I moved to Cleveland the first thing I particularly did was get a job in a Steel Mill, and I worked there three or four years. I mean a lot of people think that industrial shit is bleak and depressing and all that shit. I don't believe that at all. It's real neat."

"It's got a lot of real shitty things about it y'know. It's dirty and smelly, but at the same time . . . I mean if you live in the country, y'know you wait around for the sunset and the sun goes down. You live in the city and you wait around for the sunset and the whole sky lights up in seven colours."

The expansiveness one might expect from such words is missing. Instead Tom Hermann the moustachioed, friendly guitarist, talks quietly, more with the involvement which comes from recalling the past. —

"You ride around in the factory areas and . . . just these incredible rhythms are going on. KERCHUNK, KERCHUNK; these things exploding, and its pretty intense, and it sounds real neat, and its a lot of fun to watch."

"The place that I worked in, they had . . . like a storage area, for these huge hulks of steel. And they had them stacked twenty feet high, row upon row for like a quarter of a mile in this covered building. And they had cranes that would lift 200,000 lbs that were picking them up and you sit in the crane and run down to the end, to collect slabs from this quarter of mile of slabs . . . stacked up, with green smoke floating by."

"It was a real neat experience. It wasn't a negative thing at all. You never find anything like that in nature. Maybe if you go to a Volcano, you see some-



thing equally spectacular. I'm sure Hurricanes are real neat but we don't live through them. People go and hide in their cellars. You can go into a factory and watch it happen, see it, and feel the whole power of the thing. It's just immense."

So Pere Ubu's past is closely woven with Cleveland. While Hermann worked in the Mills, David Thomas; who had also already donned his alternate guise — Crocus Behemoth — as a rock writer for various local papers; decided in September '75 he wanted to investigate the possibilities of recording. He already had a song '30 Seconds Over Tokyo', ready, left over from a previous group Rocket From the Tombs, and in ringing up a number of people whom he considered stimulating to the recording process, a loose amalgam was instigated. These included 'highly competent musicians' as well as one who'd never played before who, "went out and got a guitar when David called. . ."

This latter was Peter Laugner, another writer (Cream, Circus and a friend of David's. These two, together with Tom, and Allan Ravenstein on synthesizers, Scott Krauss, drums and Tim Wright bass, recorded 'Tokyo' as a one-off; group permanence only settled upon upon after a live gig, on New Year's Eve, to publicise the single.

From there on a name — Pere Ubu, Davids' choice, taken from Alfred Jarry's series of Ubu plays, whose leading characters bore a similar portly physique; and showing Davids' interest in Jarry's Docteur Faust, the child of pataphysics; an interest shared, incidentally, by the likes of Robert Wyatt and Henry Cow. The next two years have been spent slowly finding places, and then a residency, to play, in the city's barren clubland, notorious for

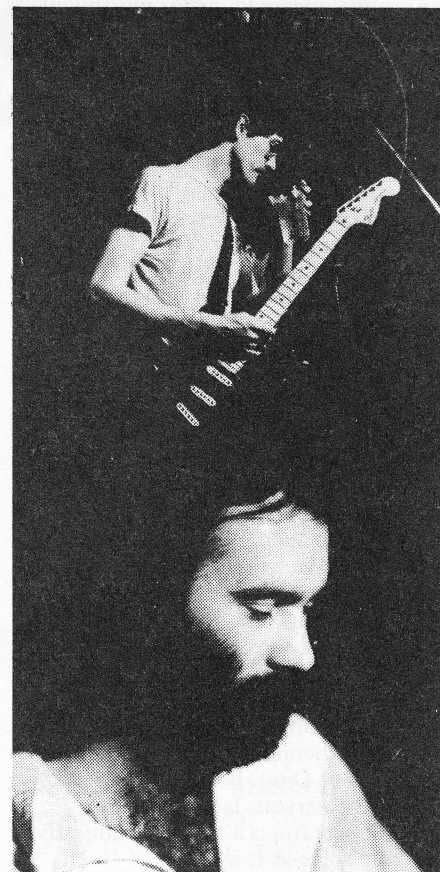
its absence of any place out of which new scenes (musical or otherwise) could evolve. During the same period they recorded two more singles, Laugner's 'Final Solution', since dropped because of its possible Nazi connotations, and 'Street Waves', both on their own Hearthan label. They also slowly coaxed Allan Ravenstein, who didn't play live, out onto stage, — "He's a sounds person. He did tapes that you'd hear mixed into the sounds you were making. But he'd do it sitting down in a controlled atmosphere."

There was too at one earlier point a possible deal with Chrysalis — brought almost about by Chris Briggs (not surprisingly) but this fell through due to misunderstandings, and the tragic death of Peter Laugner "... too much drink, and too much drugs. It was real stupid."

In the more recent past though seven or so hundred of each of the singles have found their way over to England (mostly to Rough Trade) soliciting the kind of excited approval that moved them from mere reputation into a legitimate cult.

Last year, there was finally a record deal with Clive Bernstein's small Blank label, licenced to Phonogram. Ironically suitable as the USA's outlet for a country which, likelihood has it, will never be ready for this band. And of course out of this has come an album 'The Modern Dance', its cover accentuating the indefinable, the occi-oriental worker (industrial serf=modern man/dance?) neither distinctly from any generation, nor clearly on the ground. Perhaps as much at home in a Tien Shan Railway Works as a Chicago dock front?

Since the album things have been moving fast for Pere Ubu. Oscillating from rumours, which disappeared as



quickly as they arrived, that they would support the Sex Pistols' only American sortie, to actual tours; first of the States' east coast, and then a short, but exceedingly successful tour of this country.

That tour was accompanied with that humdrum buzz of excited tension, amongst audience and press alike, which occurs once a group begins to move from the years of registered obscurity — "the basement" as Ubu called it — to a rapid escalation in recognition, especially when such recognition is justified, and



the group concerned, are as worthwhile and as special as, in this case, Ubu were.

And perhaps bitten by the specialness of this case, both Sounds and NME came up with remarkable sympathetic and understanding interviews/articles. Ones' which although at times oozing the more garish colours of, 'this is the next big thing from across the water, believe it, until we say don't' hype, showed a genuine enough belief that warranted the space and pretention, given to them.

Of course, both the space and pretention within were thoroughly deserved. Pere Ubu music is radically contemporary; though that is not to say it is contemporary radical music like, say, The Residents. Based within rock, it's mesmerisingly electric, intense rock,—the beat to today's and tomorrow's dance.

At the same time, it is tinged with so many other possibilities, overtones, made up, at one end, by the concrete sounds emitted mostly from Ravenssteins' ill fed synthesizer.

At the other end, there is Crocus' voice, the strangest mixture of possible vocal callisthenics since either Beefheart or Dion. Between the gawky squeal, the nervous laugh, and the moaning scream, is a sound as honestly a singing voice as it isn't.

Together these fit to conjure up the amazing imageist quality this band/music deliver. Loaded partisan images, instilled emphatic and dramatic...

"Each song is a little abstract picture. Like its not like the lines are cohesive with each other. They all have a central emotion which David is working from. The thing we try to do is to keep things as undefined as possible. How can I put that so it means what I want it to mean? If you define something you limit it. We never work towards things. Y'know

'Chinese Radiation' started out because everybody was really tickled with the fact that the chinese had blown off a bunch of nuclear bombs, and all the fallout in the jet stream was coming over the U.S. Its taking the whole thing of nukes and bringing it down to a personal level."

The images contained within Pere Ubu music are both personal and intensely human. Strangely absent from most mediums, except perhaps the best of black and white photography. Such as Henri Cartier Bresson who intimately captures all the drama and contrast; that edge; of human emotion, within the fickle borders of celluloid.

And what Pere Ubu do is aural celluloid. The moving landscape of the B-side of life. All but an extreme minority of rock bands have failed to catch even the crudest of such forms. And thus, it is left to those standing out there on rock's peripheries to develop and expand such avenues.

Can have done it, marvellously, their rhythmic waltzes, hypnotizing the listener to a close alternative to the drug experience. Beefheart too, a similar reference point.

There are others— Robert Wyatt's two beautiful solo albums — and the more recent Bowie-Eno collaborations. Although at this point little known, the south London group, This Heat know the possibilities that texture offers — of opening a particular door — an offer they also know they mustn't refuse.

Elsewhere in rock, there is little that impresses. Dub, I suppose takes you... but Ubu alone, for their idiosyncracies have captured these imageist qualities, within an almost mainstream rock framework.

The results stand. . . There are all three Hearthan singles, and there is the Modern Dance album. All contain the germs of this, different sides and different extremities.

At one end "Sentimental Journey", a neurotic tango, a room, perhaps a return to the past, probably the desperation of the present, hate and love, and the continual if very passive — nihilistic? — breaking, not smashing of glass, over an unwinding, slow, tortured, but very structured sound.

All this even though it, "just came out of having fun one day we were dicking around, Crocus yelling 'Summertime and the living is easy', Alan's in the corner throwing pieces of metal against the wall, for fun, and I'm banging my guitar on the floor ... then months later we were doing something else only making something real out of it, and that was 'Sentimental Journey'.

At a totally different end one finds the infectious, off centre poppishness of the albums final track 'Humour Me', again with its trace of desperation, but its perfect construction, this time, adding up to nothing less than Talking Heads.

In a perverse way that fits. For if Talking Heads are America's suburbia — with its' self celebration — then Pere Ubu are its working city — the very heart of the beast, wounded, but still alive.

Now there is a second album, 'Dub Housing', as well as the just completed british tour. Both of which in their way have been equally exciting.

Both too, have provided ample evidence that once again Ubu are the last tango, THE modern dance.

And given the offer, how could one refuse the chance to make with that.



THE FALL

LOOKING FOR A NEW CAREER IN A NEW TOWN



Manchester: a different place in a different year, different from what you have gathered from your varnished clippings. From the outside it only touches the edge of colour.

People use words, the common ones - 'apathy', 'dead', and the like - to describe the current state of play. It is said by those who should know, and by those who maybe do, that Manchester's spark and revered vitality has all but burnt itself out. By others it is suggested that whatever apparent scene existed was the fabrication of a few fertile but strategically placed imaginations.

Certainly the motivation, the short era of concerted action, a random pitch into experimentation, and a search, however ill-equipped, for alternatives, has been thrown out with the garbage. Left only for the past to pick up on with a certain untidy disenchantment.

As usual what once ran you up has let you down.

Those who have succeeded, The Buzzcocks - a pop group, and Magazine - another pop group (in a different glasshouse) remain in town, but only physically. No longer are they (wildly) interested in furthering that initial fervour now that commerce has both caught up and caught/courted them.

And those who haven't, pass into the past tense with hardly a ripple, even for memory's sake. The Worst, for example, whose motto, so they say, was "we will never sign to a record company". Neither did they. Or alternately they have passed along the routine route from interest in the possibilities, to interest in the straight and narrow of a... er... rock career. Envy of the music scene, so to speak.

There are, despite the negativity

of the picture so far woven, a number of newer, younger bands who though so far nascent rather than mobile, have their intents set on digesting experimentation and challenge, and auger well for the future.

The only band, though, out of Manchester's vaguely bordered first wave who haven't passed up on their initial ideals and reasons for forming is the Fall - out there with their hopes and intentions intact, waiting observant and slendered.

The medium-sized room you enter has no dominant features to capture your immediate attention. Books are on the floor, and records too. Much played and ill-kept, any hi-fi consciousness conspicuous only in its absence. The records include the likes of Zappa, Reed, and Beefheart, and others.

On the mantelpiece a postcard is noticed, a portrait of D.H. Lawrence. When, as he returns into the room, you look at The Fall's rakishly tall Mark Smith, the similarity strikes you as more than just possibility.

They, The Fall as a Manchester group, as a name, have been around sometime, picking up a shoal of affirmative press clippings along the way. These in turn have conjured up ill-fitting (?) images; far left of Clashtalk, political, as in subject matter. Countless benefits, as in grim photo stares - and something more, no compromise, playing it close, playing it said, the bare essentials, minimalist, bleak, nightmare type doodlings - music - noise.

Initially, in the summer of '77, a group of people with similar aspirations to the above. From there on, fired by the new wave, and brought together by shared tastes - the Velvets, Doors, Beefheart again, it was only a matter of time before conception was overtaken by practise, and a band was borne. It was also only a matter of time before The Outsiders, a temporary moniker at most, was ousted in favour of Tony Friel's, their erstwhile bassist - persuasive suggestion of a more evocative Camus title, The Fall.

Apart from Mark, the singer and main lyricist, and Friel, that first group was comprised of Una Baines, another words person and Keyboards player - of whom much (too much?) has been written about her feminism. Martin Bramah on guitar, into Richard Hell and his surrounding vibe - if not the musical results; and lastly a slightly late addition in the form of the drummer, Karl Burns.

Too many arguments, too many divergent thoughts, split this band. Friel, bored with the ensuing direction, left to start another band, The Passage - now gathering momentum - whilst Una retrod her steps after experiencing, in sharp focus the already encroaching music 'scene' - affected not suprisingly by the way the media was portraying her.

Both remain close to the band, honorary members of a sort.

Despite the various internal difficulties, this acrid version managed before breaking apart to make it onto vinyl. Aided by Richard Boon - Buzzcocks manager, both financially and spiritually (belief and care) they recorded the until recently dormant single, 'Bingo Masters Breakout'. By no means outstanding, it still, despite gracing a more garish picture of technical rudiments, stands head and feet above the average weekly slew of punk releases. 'Repetition', a five minute excersise in monotony is marvellous in its own awry way, a wry humour at work in the occasional, very slight lapses of repetition. Much more potent live, the EP material remains an unfulfilled document of their past.

Since then, and since the split, up till recently, there has been a period of fluctuation, with a merrygoround of players coming and going, staying a week or maybe two. Mark says the period was one of re-adjusting thoughts and focuses. A period to pull in the nets, and beach boats, until the moment had been weathered, and until a new and longer-term line up came into place. Until, in fact, Marc - a former friend and roadie - was slotted in on bass, and Yvonne - a diminutive Nico confidante now on scratchy elemental Keyboards, arrived from the deadends of Doncaster. Both are young - 16 - feeling their way, and bringing permanence and, as such, catalysts to the band, however unintentional.

That permanence is beginning to pay. It is only a matter of days before their second single, 'The New Thing' is out. A sly testament to things on the hipper side of the tracks, it is also the first vinyl from the new band. More than worthwhile, pick it up.

Live too, while the group retain the aura of the ramshackle, the spectre of the anarchic, they are beginning to move out of the somewhat limiting variations on a purely minimalist theme. Whether totally successful or not, most of the material is effective and powerful though on occasion the sound drops fathoms, into dirgeful mundanity. Disparagements aside, tedium is mostly avoided, indeed transcended. The songs are as sparsely ominous as either early Love or the Velvets, but mated too, to the contained savagery of heavierweight Buzzcocks. The music too, implies distinct psychedelic overtones, due in part to the Keyboards, but mostly to Martin's inspired line in completely off the wall guitar solos, charged anachronisms at their best.

Martin apart, the other focal point on stage is, of course, Mark. Up there, his movements and expression give his thoughts away; the sham of the spectacle, a disillusion that people can still believe in the shamanism the stage provides. Your court jestor, grossly he exaggerates all the essential rock moves, those which seduce an audience into the age-old myth that the performer cares, that he is committed to each one of us.

Already you know he is caught within the cleavages of the game, the limitat-

ions, the tedium of the medium.

That he continues to mock - and so obviously so, rather than resign himself to some particular school of readymade rock poses shows that he does care. And care passionately.

Offstage this latter case is more obvious. Drab, anti-image, a body that fits its clothes better than it suggests, long hair these days (which get him a lot of hassle from hardcore punks), eyes that light up often, and words that do so too.

One of those words that do is probably action; It concerns Mark a lot, as does his impotence in his attempts to change outside situations. What always sparked his writing in his old songs: 'Industrial Estate', 'Bingo Masters Breakout', 'Steppin Out', though culled from the drudgery of average life, was his complete inability to render any kind of effective change within that very drudgery - stasis in the face of movement, perhaps.

Things have changed though. The Fall, having become a fair to middling pop attraction (sic) lets Mark dabble in new environments resulting in new songs - 'Envy Of The Music Scene', 'The New Thing', 'Mess Of My',

"I am still in a real situation, but in a music situation, so I'm not going to write about oppression, stuff like 'Steppin Out', that I used to write about work, and how I resented it. When you get in different situations you should write about them.

"The music scene is just as stimulating as any other average working environment. The possibilities are endless. I thought I'd find it difficult, but...

'Leave a mark on the city, oh smash your doors down

Become a demolition worker, a mental construction worker

Spat spat spat on the coat, cut hair or miss the boat

And become part of The Music Scene'

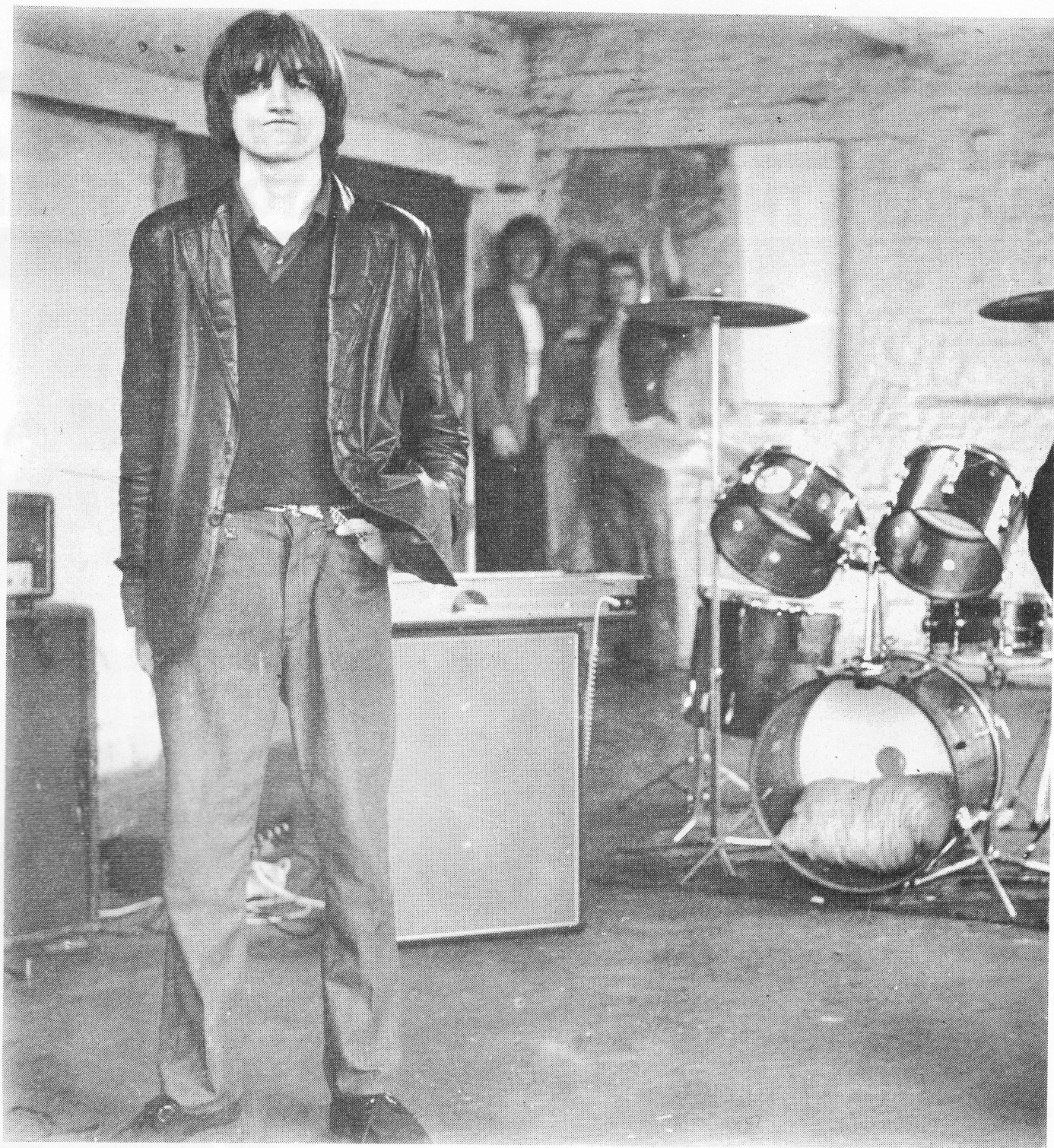
Later something similar crops up.

"You can feel the entrails (of the music biz.) That is why the Buzzcocks' tour (then a possible support position) is a big point of contention. Y'know, sell the T-shirts and all that shit.

"We're not coping out on anybody, nobody's being disillusioned by The Fall. 'We played the Apollo (Manchester's main venue), The Lyceum in London with Penetration. People are still there and they know why we are there. There and they know why we are there. To a lot of bands it means a lot but to us it means fuck all. The day after, we played a free gig in Oldham.

He does add that he gets a, "sort of arrogant joy - like 'take this' " out of playing a place like the Lyceum.

Compromise then is the other major theme in Mark's mind. He worries a lot about it - usually in relation to action; that if he is going to get things through, is going to communicate, then a certain level of compromise will ensue. Contradictions that he hasn't yet come to terms with. This latter point becomes so clear whilst talking about political



bands:

"I'm pulled two ways. I don't agree with Tom Robinson singing anti-sexist songs against stale old Chuck Berry riffs. That's farcical. But I also don't agree with Henry Cow singing political tracts in front of quasi-classical avant-garde music, even though I enjoy it. It's very obscure."

"ATV get into that a bit too far, and it is one of the problems with Henry Cow who say we won't have big publicity, we'll only play in Town Halls and colleges."

They don't remind one of any of those though. Don't remind one of TRB or Henry Cow, and only slightly of Perry's quartet. The ill-fated Derelicts perhaps, but the best description I stumbled across

was in some fanzine, dedicated "to The Fall, the best underground band in the country." They concur, "because the underground won't accept us", strangely, unwittingly a Siouxsie reference.

Underground they certainly are. A part of the undertow of the new wave, refreshingly disinterested in the usual straws of success or brief fleeting hours as some kind of media personality.

In place they are sowing seeds, along with a few other bands. ATV, The Prefects are others that spring to mind, nurturing a new scene — one that depends on communication more than anything else, whether through straight gigs, benefits, or free gigs. The latter, they say, if they could live off them, would be a perfect life. Contradictions again, though.

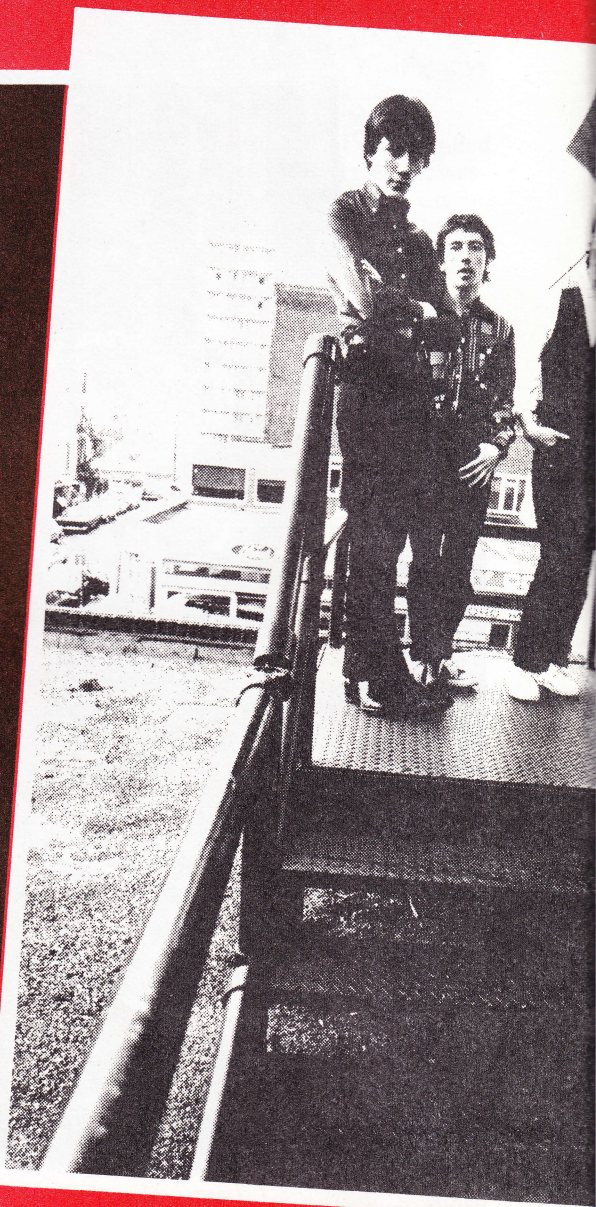
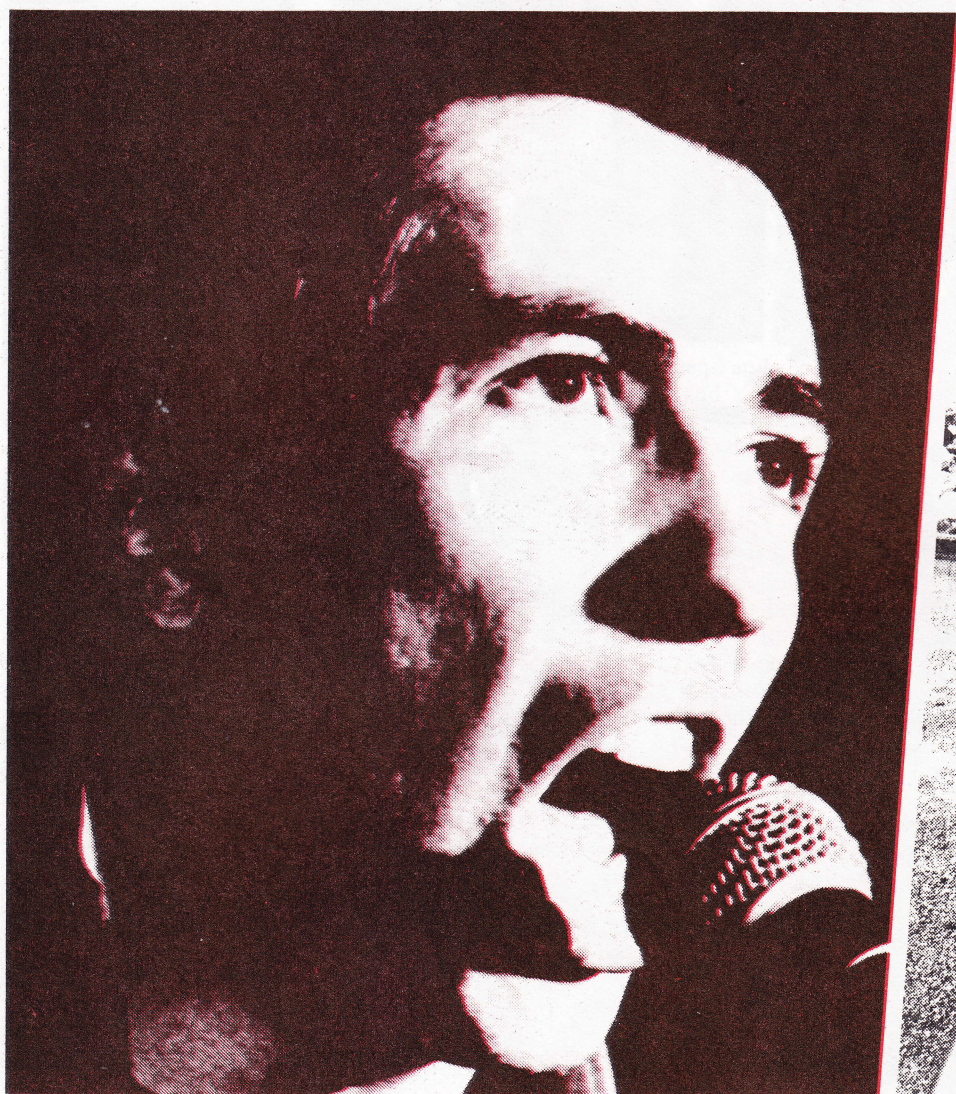
The paradox, and the contradiction too, in all of this is of course that each move they make is into the machine they, or at least Mark, appears to loathe. Record contracts open, hip-cult status falls to its knees and offers itself, and some level of success — the new thing — overground from normality seems assured.

The purported (ha) interview over, I wander out, considering upon possible article titles. Bowie's 'New Career In A New Town' comes from nowhere — seeming, whatever he meant by it, oddly suitable.

Redefining 'career', just as The Fall do, and redefining 'town', implying the hope of community. Just what The Fall are looking for.

THE CASE FOR THE BUZZ

BRINGING THE PUBLIC SECRETS TO THE SECRET



Too many superficialities have been written about The Buzzcocks, too soon.

From two years of hubbling, bubbling laudatory right through to the present obvious backlash, both parties, admirer and detractor alike, have with all the vision of the blindfolded, failed constantly and consistently to see what The Buzzcocks are about.

The wholly redundant and unenviably limited critical tools have been applied, and have succeeded only in totally misunderstanding Buzzcocks' relevance, probably because the group are so close to, yet in the end so inconvenient for writers and their stereotypes.

Yes of course they are a Pop group; - although at the same time they are not. Pop is what The Buzzcocks are undoubtedly about, but Pop with unfolding connotations; pop without capital letters.

At the same time, nearer their inception, they were de rigour Punk. Very much contemporaries of The Clash, similarly inspired into existence by the Pistols; bustling down from Manchester in aged transport either to play the Roxy, secret gigs at the Screen On The Green Cinema, or to be part of the White Riot melee.

BZZCOCKS

PUBLIC



If though you asked Richard Boon the difference between the group whose concerns he manages and another that sprang from this former he would reply, —

“The difference is that Buzzcocks (his concern) are a Pop group and Magazine are not.”

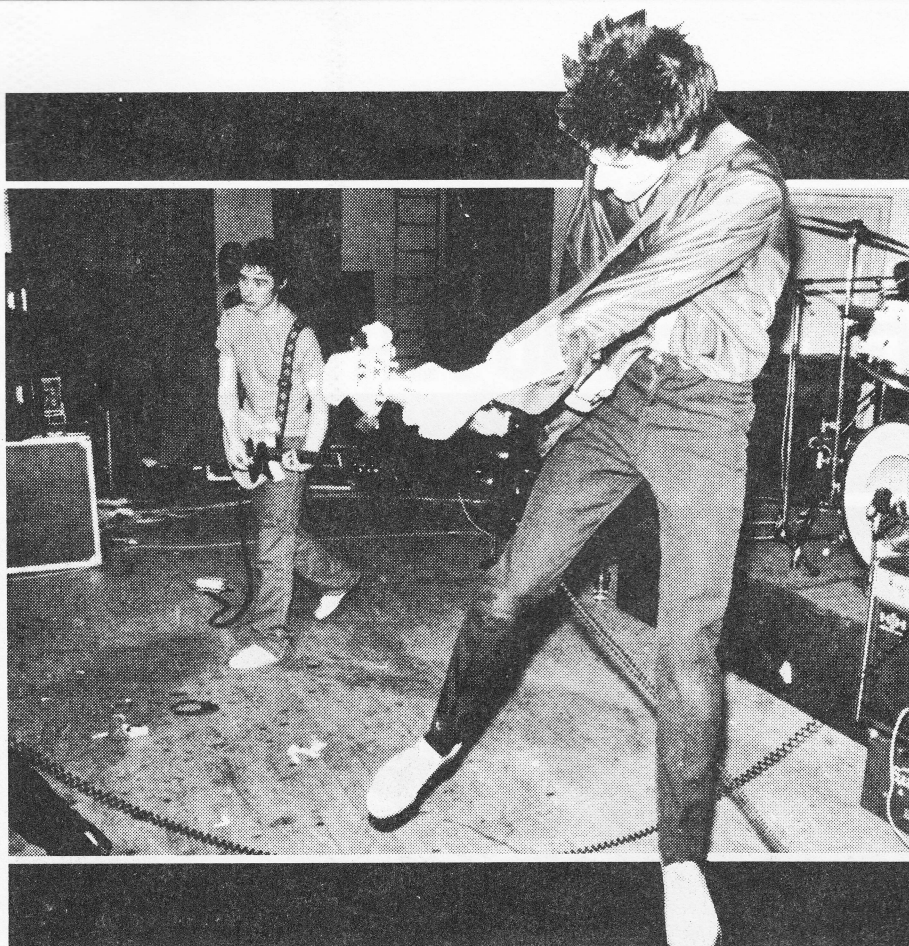
Similarly Paul Morley, NME's north-west person; another who is definitely in the front seat, though not steering the Manchester car; has, with effusiveness just ousting elegance, at every passing mention juxtaposed Buzzcocks to the same two words.

So with skill and manipulation the Buzzcocks, after all and everything have become a Pop group.

What is more their arrival and success, even late in the day, coming as it did from behind, or rather from under, the first punk wave, has been for 1978 nothing short of phenomenal: the discreet distractions tell you so. From the all pervasive popularity of Buzzcock badges to the droll appearances on Top of the Pops. From Manchester's wildly successful ANL carnival; where 50,000 or so turned up — for reasons of their own (statements) some (many?) also to

see the Buzzcocks; to the artefact which silently announces some measure of success, wither of the cult or of the mainline — a bootleg, 'Times Up'. It too has quickly sold out its two thousand pressings.

As a success Buzzcocks live are enigmatically off-putting. Before you a pop audience, composed of the new generation, moving the late seventies moves with different degrees of aptitude. Young and fevered they contain the urgency that characterises the gap between the provincial and metropolitan.



Then beyond, on stage The Buzzcocks, a pop group, entertaining (as the adds say), undermining their presence (for a pop group) devoid of the usual rush of ego. No flash histrionics, little mock hysterics; the occasional spasm from the mildly photogenic bassist; but, — four people and a breakdown of the form; the stage roles. An unnerving disinterest in, and dispassion for, their power.

Instead you watch and listen, hypnotised each in your own way/sway both by the exquisite Mondrian derived shirts/clothes; the shirts are the clothes; and by the music. A music where the Buzzcocks have progressed from the raw minimalism of those early demo's, into a group which is playing — in its best moments — the best purely contemporary pop, punk, whatever music this side of the Sex Pistols. Where the infection of simplicity has met a wider vision, which though not at all times completely successful (especially regarding 'Lovebites') is nonetheless on the whole inspired and uncompromising futuresque pop. Another music for the jukeboxes of a different age; to almost paraphrase a recent but popular expression.

Through the singles, through the debut 'Kitchen' album, and to a lesser extent the new album, through these gigs, and also the Assorted, but strikingly different, Images, the publicity and especially the cover artwork has created, Buzzcocks have succeeded; whether through design or default, chance, or more likely, the past; in constructing the possibilities of a new relationship within their music, and potentially to the audience, whilst at the same time remaining mainline,

within pop.

As illusive as it is exclusive it is something which their immediate english contemporaries have not got, and never will have, because their self-vision is fuelled by some revamped sixties pop-star role-ethos. Something which even with all the hype and open-handed gesture The Clash will never possess. Something which their more obvious peers — the vacuous pop-raunch and sensodyne gloss of Generation X or The Boys, so studiously emulating the half-wasted chic pose-too, too late for '78 — could never come close to. And lastly it is something that neither the populist banter of a Tom Robinson, or the abrasive polemic of a Jim Pursey (be they folk artists or not), will ever attain.

Unlike these, Buzzcocks image neither depends upon, nor exploits the cheap media gambit of personality; the thousand sparkled smiles, the thrill (of it all) one gets from envying the glamorous: There is none of this, only a covert attack upon . . . Image has the other references, an incognito who designs the graphics, strong, corporate, bringing identity and attracting the Bowie types — as do the shirts, or the adverts, a touch upon situationist thinking, those plastic bags from the first album; in every, and every final, analysis product is product is . . . Or put another way if every new record you bought made you feel brand new, how many times would you have lived, or died . . . they are bringing the public secrets to the secret public.

Evenso, the media needing — they never used to want — personality (thesis; the usual one; personality = excitement = copy = sellage = survival?) have dubbed Shelley a new romantic. The connota-

tions to that are both positive; — redefining, enlarging romance into real life (where have I heard that before) and real life into romance — no separation; and negative; — another person, another romantic-no subversion of meaning, no difference, no fun.

Asked, Shelley will smile his affable smile, and say he likes the tag. It is certainly more immediate and conversant than Richard Boons' deadpan, but inevitably stolid press releases for their earliest UA singles. *"Whatever Happened To, describes both the love object of a supermarket society and the process that transforms nostalgia and romance into yet more consumer goods."*

Those first lines on 'I don't Mind', — "Reality is a dream, a game in which I seem to never find out what I am" — seem at once the most personal and desperate Shelley has so far slipped into his lyrics. In conversation he doesn't for a moment strike you so, but highly amiable and personable company, a nervy amusement — in his voice — and an enjoyment in pleasing.

Communication and enjoying the pleasure of company is, one imagines, important. Indeed as the lyrics suggest, through the quiet mancurian tingeing, he conveys an overall impression of the outsider, the once, though no longer, rejected, and also, of someone now forced to undertake more confidence, due to overtaken circumstance, than perhaps willing. At one point when asked whether mass acceptance and popularity will erode both his position as, and inspirational source of, the onlooker, he says coyly, but with just the right strain of humoured irony, "no, I'm different", as if defying you to believe him. At another moment he says, though it is quickly lost within the flow of conversation, "all the events in my life have occurred through chance", suggesting, perhaps, an earlier flirtation with Camus.

So beyond his recent past; a humanities course at Bolton Poly alongside Howard Trafford-Devoto, active in the students union; a London NUS meeting was, ironically, the first chance to seek out the Sex Pistols live, an important moment; beyond the influences, and the other things, Shelley has come out the other side, master of a group, he probably doesn't see lasting more than a couple of years. Mostly now though, the self doubt has become merely implication: —

"Orgasm Addict. It's the basic thing of the disco. Dark lights . . . the last dance. The guys who are unfortunate enough not to have picked up somebody by the last dance, they go around picking up anybody. Those are people who can only have a relationship which ends in orgasm . . ."

As a commodity, like fiction romance —

"Well, 'Fiction Romance' is a commodity (obviously) it may be exhibited in books, in the stores, in the dreams.

"Normal romance is — you meet



somebody — and this is the person who will stay with you the rest of your life, and you feel happy and elated.

Do you still believe —

“I don’t know. To some extent I can see both sides of the irony.

“The normal way to a love affair — is that you meet someone, you see them, you really like them, you really like them, you fall in love with them, If you’re really lucky they fall in love with you, and everything is concentrated on that person with everything else excluded — all relationships. And

then one day — out, and someone else comes in, and you just sit back and the relationship stops completely.

“I think I know why it happens, enough people believe in it . . . the intensity is a con. It’s something which you force upon yourself. It can be as intense as you want it to be, the thing is you can only make it intense because you want an exclusive relationship, and you can’t concentrate on anything else apart from the relationship.”

Love then? — “Yeah I believe in love . . . in that two people can hit it

off, in some way, and that they enjoy being with each other, enjoy their company together.”

Later talking about a new song, ‘Never Fall in Love With Someone One Shouldn’t’, (the recent single) — . . . I’ve been working on the first line since November — ‘you disturb my natural emotions’ ”.

“You believe in natural emotions then.”

A pause, an ‘um’, —

“There are some things which are natural, certain emotions and fulfil-

ments — there's a basic desire for partnership."

Conversation, of course, did not limit itself to such exclusive subject matter. It is interesting though in that the real key and relevancy to the Buzzcocks remains the bands, in general, and Shelleys, in particular, overview of, and concern with, relationships between people — the unfolding carpet of the living room. When you hear or see them live, the other key perception about the Buzzcocks is; linked inextricably to the beautiful breakdown in form; that their vision — words and music — either conscious or by nurtured accident is also a breakdown of, and also a usurption over, all the traditional machismo rock embraces (rock — an open definition of limitless machismo?). But not through an escapist indulgence in wimp phantasmagoria, but by an attack, intuitively or otherwise, on, and exposure of, the consumerist basis (ethos) from which machismo consciousness is based.

'Fast Cars', 'What Do I Get', 'I Need', et al are all in essence the aural equivalent of Linders' savagely powerful collage, a brilliant attack on sexual consumption which adorns the cover of 'Orgasm Addict'.

Buzzcocks words, and Buzzcocks music compare well. Savage, powerful are good adjectives. Buzzcocks music is powerful, savage, but also exquisitely sculptured pop, at once anima and animus, hueing through the vast majority of their contemporaries just by being so contemporary — independent of sentiment, removed from the past (the roots are seventies roots — Bowie of course, the Velvets in spirit, and Roxy ironically.) mainline yet not mainline — and because of that both a real, though perhaps not instantly recognisable, subversion, and a blueprint, a pointer for the future.

Whether this stays will depend on outside factors — and doesn't in the end matter. Record companies — the pressures push in, and already take their toll in the shape of an admittedly and unfortunately so, shaky second album. Commerce has demanded a very uneasy, and a very rushed job, in which the ideas tumble out as unfinished as they are unconvincing. What maybe is needed is firmer groundwork for experimentation, which then can be effectively shaped into the obvious pop sensibility of Shelleys' songs.

Despite this the corner, whether half way house or no halfway house, has so obviously been turned.

And in spite of the distractions — every/Manchesters' clique is the same, — again —, and despite the detractions, — that of last weeks plaything, this weeks Tremeloes (though the real bearers of that mantle are the Boomtown Rats), Buzzcocks, a pop group, in small letters, who at this moment are walking the jugular tightrope, have; whether intentionally or not; made the statement, one which can be checked, and moved on from.



Caroline Coon

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
RELEASE AND THE
CLASH IS ELEVEN YEARS



At the age of five she wanted, and had decided, to become a top ballet dancer. With a single-mindedness extraordinary especially, but not only for her years she went to a Russian Ballet school, following the kind of life which might have seen her passion eventually realised.

Perhaps she lacked that self-effacing discipline that dancing demands, more probably she lost interest because by the time Caroline Coon was turning 21 she could (occasionally) be found bouncing in and out of Central Art School, with the semi-wholesome aspirations of becoming a painter.

Then in 1967, something happened – she co-founded/ordinated Release, the underground advisory and help organisation for those in trouble over drugs busts. Overnight, or at least as quick as the rumbling Fleet Street can move, she became a media personality, along with the various doyens of the Underground press; I.T., Frenz and of course OZ.

As a focus of the underground, a pinpoint for Fleet Street's ranging compass, the children of these Ladbroke Grove bedhourins became, maybe inevitably spokespeople for a new generation – whence the consummate ideologies of the psychedelic revolution (maaan) were decimated.

Caroline Coon along with her various travelling companions, Richard Neville, Germaine Greer, Felix Dennis, other Ozkidz, et al, became a perfect spokesperson for the age. Because she was pretty, had an upper-class background, and spoke in positive, succinct, lucid, and most of all, rational terms, she was liked, or at least respected in the more liberal areas of the press. Often, she would turn up on those sunday afternoon religious programmes, at once informing on and defending the hippie culture's anti-materialist base.

At the other end, she was easy prey for character assassination, especially amongst the tabloids – who would use her as a prime target of the rich girl who had everything going for her – only going badly astray; in all the grisly manifestations – dope, rock'n'roll, politix,

sex —; inevitably, they would, as she herself says, bring up the fact that in an earlier, very much younger incarnation, she had once done centrespreads for *Mayfair*.

Irony, or fate, or both has it that a few years later she ended up writing the *Mirror's* Pop Column. In between, there had been leaving *Release*, writing for *I.T.*, and finally the *OZ* obscenity trials.

Since the *Mirror*, and other Freelance work "... interviewing chimpanzees for the *Radio Times*", Caroline has turned seriously to rock writing.

Melody Maker sent her out to interview the likes of Lindsey De Paul, and to do an amusing and original singles column.

What though, sent her journalistic reputation soaring, and gives her a renewed, but nonetheless real enough importance (though she'll hate me for saying that) was that she was one of the first two (the other being expatriate and ex *Sounds* writer John Ingham) writers to support, and help expose Punk, with the same single-minded passion that she had attended ballet classes.

At first Ray Coleman (*MM's* Editor) refused to allow her any kind of type-space, despite her desires to write about the Sex Pistols since the earliest days of 1976. Instead they sent a very cynical Allan Jones to witness the Pistols at the Nashville, with explicit pocket orders for hack-type copy.

Only by late mid-summer did Coleman, amid extreme Record Company hostility, relent, allowing Caroline to submit a number of pieces on the Punk scene; its socio-political connotations; the 100 Club's Punk Festival; and on the bands, the Pistols, Clash, Damned, and Stranglers.

Those articles, along with John Ingham's (on most projects they worked together) were — despite her protestations that there was already a strong roots following for the Sex Pistols, prior to the media build-up, probably the most influential in turning Punk into a real youth sub-culture it has now so obviously become. From them firstly as opposed to first-hand experience, kids the country over learned the expected moves and attitudes for a new movement — except for a tiny and equally influential percentage.

The same articles, or at least the interviews, showed she was able to communicate, and attain the trust and intimacies of those who were to become the leaders of our brave new generation, just as she had done within *Release* a decade earlier, while at the same time, hopefully fashioning and steering them in more positive directions.

Sitting crosslegged in her borrowed Fulham Flat (she's moving into a Ladbroke Grove council flat soon), amongst some of the results of Paul Simonons' art-school period, it becomes almost immediately obvious why she has managed to corner the confidences of a generation over a third her age.

She talks a lot, with no reserve, and even less pretension, but with a lot of warmth and vitality—often following her sentences with a breathy laugh, as if for enunciation. She reminded me of a pretty, articulate heron —, all limbs and gestures.

In another room, amongst a number of self-taken photo's, there is a loose piece of notepaper. Scrawled on it in red ink is, "the world is a bastard place". She found it pinned to a messages board in a Belfast College whilst touring with the Clash. Unlike most of her erstwhile contemporaries (re Felix Dennis, letters, Leveller 7) she doesn't seem to have given up her hope for definite change.

There is though a certain toughness in her, perhaps the result of years of internal hounding for and from her background, and also a reaction to the rampant machismo in the music biz (and probably too, its reaction to her power.)

The conversation/discussion — was pretty loose, I arrived with some topics to throw around. She talked, answering sometimes with a slightly frustrating vagueness, mostly though it was spot on and always articulate:-

'Those early pieces on Punk always seemed orientated towards the sociology of the phenomena. How much was this a conscious kind of thing?'

'My bias was always towards the sociology of the phenomena — what was also fantastically interesting to me was that the medium of rock'n'roll was so precise to translate a sociological, political feeling. It was personal politics, not necessarily politics with a capital P — Party Politics — that was so right for me. I mean you can't have bands and lyrics like the Pistols, the Clash. Even the Damned, though they weren't talking about dole-queues so much. They were talking about the politics of relationships, personal lyrics, and very personal statements about their feelings about relationships at this point in time, writing very different love songs to what Soft Machine and the Pink Floyd were writing a decade before, given that the politics of psychedelia were expressed by the Soft Machine and the Pink Floyd.'

So you really believe there is a complete parallel?

There is a parallel of contrasts. But within that parallel it's almost entirely opposed feelings. And I think the thesis works very well up till the time the third wave bands started turning that negativity of the Clash's and the Pistol's politics which were having a disastrously negative effect on the whole scene. And that was devastating to someone like Jimmy Pursey who was a real fan of what the movement is about. And he thought the movement is saying something and we can do something about it. So you had Robinson and Pursey saying that we are positively inclined to do this, that, and the other, and that in effect is having a very positive effect on what the Clash are doing?

Complete dialectics? ... A kind of internal dialectics within the framework of Punk, and dialectics within the youth of society — the reaction to the whole psychedelia trip ...

The reaction to psychedelia ... It's interesting that the Pistols Clash generation were reacting to psychedelia as they had read it through the national tabloid press. And the national tabloid press did to hippies exactly what ... they then did to Punks ... This generation believed the Fleet St. myth and had not understood what had happened to psychedelia, the hippie philosophy the media destroyed.

You obviously had great hopes of it.

What was devastating was to be 19/20 and to find Mick Jagger, one's Street Fighting Man, arrested and sent to Prison, to see what the Establishment was doing to our very positive ideology. It was devastating to anyone who did believe it. In a sense my prophylaxis interest 10 years later was very calculatedly trying to oppose what the establishment was patently obviously going to do once they understood they could sell copies by reporting it in the most heinous, slanderous, in the most dis-



gusting way. I mean everything they wrote about Johnny Rotten was just abject slander. But they've done just the same to Richard Neville, Germaine Greer, Caroline Coon . . .

What was difficult was to work for seven years, as I did within the hippie ideology, to realise that however many facts you presented to the authorities, however many ideas full of integrity and hope that you had, they were out to destroy you. I thought if you presented another point of view — that they would actually say, 'ah right, lets incorporate this into our modus operandi.' No Way.

When did you realise it was No Way. I suppose it was the OZ trial, realising the Establishment . . .

It was the OZ Trial, realizing the establishment had millions of pounds to pit against us and that they were prepared to send Richard Neville to Prison, rather than have him publish cartoons of schoolkids being beaten by schoolmasters, and Rupert Bear running along with a rampant phallus. I was never disillusioned with the hippie philosophy. The philosophy is now endemic in society as we know it today. The

whole ecological issue, the women's movement issue, the whole anti-capitalist position. That is the ipso facto of the hippie ideology. The whole drug culture is now part of the air you breathe.

But you see, getting back to the initial point . . . it just happened that I've always liked the sort of clothes that the Sex shop catered for. Like I never had enough money to buy high st fashion — ever, ever. Hippie's, basically one's dress was second hand portobello market stalls clothes. Despised High St fashion — wouldn't be seen dead wearing it. Malcom's shop was quite interesting because it was on the same site as one of the most well known Hippie shops . . . When Malcolm came along — oh great, here are these great rock'n'roll clothes, which meant tight black jeans, stilleto heels — none of that horrible hippie 'Dumb' colour which one had got very bored of, and I was always wearing forties clothes anyway — so suddenly you got pistacchio greens and day-glo pinks — which one would occasionally lust after, although whether one actually bought them or not —

Do you think clothes can be an

important, er, subversive factor?

It is a bit facile, and I honestly think what you wear — does very much express your deep-seated fantasy of what you are. It's like the only statement an individual can have, about what he is — where he belongs what he thinks . . .

Well it's the first statement . . .

Yes, and any individual, if he can't paint, he can't write, if you can't express yourself — anybody can express themselves. It's a popular art — you can put on your body what you feel, with a Kaftan — or beads, or a bell, or safety pins, or a t-shirt, or a stencilled vest, every individual is free — no authority unless it's a fascist state can dictate that to you. However many millions of pounds are spent in the glossy fashion magazines, you can actually get under the barbed wire and express yourself.

A change of tack. How do you feel about the development, the potential that Punk had when it started out — and the difference now — that it has been emasculated?

This is where, um, I think, maybe misguidedly — one lets the cynics have their little natter. And for the last

four months they've been nattering. Punk is dead. You let them, and then you zap in with the reality that had they actually bothered to investigate the actual reality they could not possibly come up with that prognosis. It's thriving, it's coming into its second wind.

It isn't that so much, it's more your initial hopes of what Punk would achieve . . .

Now listen. I didn't have hopes for Punk. I was speaking to a generation who — reading the facts of this if one believed what they said about their generation — this was a generation of suicidal self-destructive kids. It was, er, a prognosis years ago. I knew what was happening.

Did you feel this would happen then?

Yes. I said to the Home Office seven years ago, if you do not give the hippie ideology of this generation any credibility, the next generation will come along — will be fighting you in the streets — blood will run. You cannot destroy the hopes of a generation in the cynical way that you are doing. I was waiting — there — for this to happen. And when I heard Johnny Rotten's philosophy and Joe Strummer's philosophy which was so nihilistic and so negative.

Do you think it still is?

Um . . . Well you see there is always two sides to it — individuals, human beings by their nature have to be optimistic. What one was listening to was the brave front that the generation puts on the world view. Which is, 'we can't do anything, we are selfish, what we should do is look after ourselves, and kick everybody else in the teeth'. 'I thought well if they really believe this we're in for a very rough ride . . . The Punk movement will never achieve as much as the hippie movement because it doesn't have a manifesto. Its strength is that they have identified a situation in society which existed but was being ignored, with their scream of angst. The phenomena of youth is its bravery. And ten years ago when one was talking to a 17 year old — it was the generation gap crisis — why are you so depressed, and they put such a brave front on it. Nobody wants to admit to why they are feeling so dire.

Do you think that even if the attitude was extremely nihilistic, I don't know if it still is, the effect has been extremely positive, it seems quite a distinction.

Yes but you have to go back. Why I was so horrified about the authorities view of what the hippies were ten years ago, was because we were trying to change society peacefully. For the generation who came after us, we had failed. However much you demonstrate, however much you shout, however much you show the authorities, the individual, you can't change anything.

So the nihilism the Punks had initially, was because they didn't think that anything positive would actually

affect anything. If you don't believe that anything you do isn't going to have any effect, you don't bother to do it. Nobody takes a step forward, or tries to, — unless they believe they can move a step forward.

So would you be able to put down separate effects — like people have become more politically conscious, obviously.

That is one of the joys of the whole thing that once again, politics is once again the air you breathe. I've tried very hard to explain to Johnny and Joe that when I talk about Politics — I don't mean party politics — which should be discussed — but just one's whole engagement in society — which is very positive. Because unless individuals are engaged in their society, you're just open to any fascist who comes along . . . which is very optimistic. But in a nihilistic situation you're going to have casualties, like the Pistols, the Damned and by sheer chance the Clash have just escaped, and survived till Pursey and Robinson came on.

What do you think of the current anti-Tom Robinson game?

Bullshit . . . I was sitting in the bath this morning, thinking, christ, if I was Tom Robinson, shit I'd be very — it's not easy reading negative shit about yourself — I had it myself — I must say I've got much tougher in the last three years, but, I thought Jesus Christ, the bastards, the bastards to put down Tom Robinson . . . the fact that he should be pillarised. God, I have so much admiration for those guys — they have a really tough ride. Nobody wants what Tom Robinson believes in to be accepted as right. But he has some very strong allies in the press, and I just hope there are enough kids around who can read and understand reality and are not hoodwinked by the capitalist society. But look I'm not a communist, when I say a capitalist society, but I do think that basically that what those multi-million conglomerates do to society is devastating, is dreadful.

(Moving on) What do you think of the whole change of attitudes towards Women — with Punk? I don't reckon you're a feminist . . .

(Semi-eruption) I am a feminist! I am a part of the women's movement. I fight for women's liberation everyday. Anybody who says women's liberation is shit, has yet again been corrupted by the Fleet St media.

How do you see it relating to Punk — well obviously the way you've lauded The Slits — for instance.

Unfortunately Malcolm McLaren and Bernie Rhodes are the most die-hard chauvinists — maybe they're not any worse than 90 per cent of men, but for all their so-called fucking radical views — Bernie Rhodes said to me today — "Caroline, You know I speak to Malc everyday." And I said, "yes Bernie, I'm sure you make love to Malcolm everyday." (Giggles.)

Oh, do they get on so well.

Do they . . . Yes they are the one and the same person. And Bernie said, "No I don't have anything to do with that, that's why I dislike Tom Robinson". Very interesting. A quick little aside. Bernie is so chauvinist.

Malcolm McLaren gave an interview in LA, which if published he will be sued for libel. He said that Caroline Coon is a nymphomaniac, that she'll fuck six guys a day. As if that should matter, even if I was fucking six guys a day, if it was Mick Jagger fucking six girls a day, or whatever, that's great. But, but as a 'radical', in quotes, that Malcolm should use the word 'nymphomaniac'.

Unfortunately then Malcolm and Bernie's attitude has permeated through the Clash and The Pistols — though Johnny Rotten is not what I would call a chauvinist.

What about the Clash?

Well initially — They were quite happy to call me a whore — Joe was, just you know, to use that word, whore, because they knew I wasn't a virgin and they knew two people that I'd fucked in two years. Well Joe's slowly changing. But I would say that society as a whole is screamingly chauvinist . . .

But do you think Punk generally has helped bring these things into the open?

Punk women have been amazing. It's one of the things that I've really been interested in. It was the first sub-cultural movement where women were as dominant fashion-wise as men . . . Teddyboys, skinheads, mods, they've all been male cultures, and hippies, . . . it was like freedom for the men to do what they want, as long as the women stayed at home, to sow patches on the jeans. One of the things I loved about the safety pin was one didn't fucking have to sow up jeans any more. The safety pin to me was a real symbol of liberation. (breaks up giggling)

And what about Patti (Smith)?

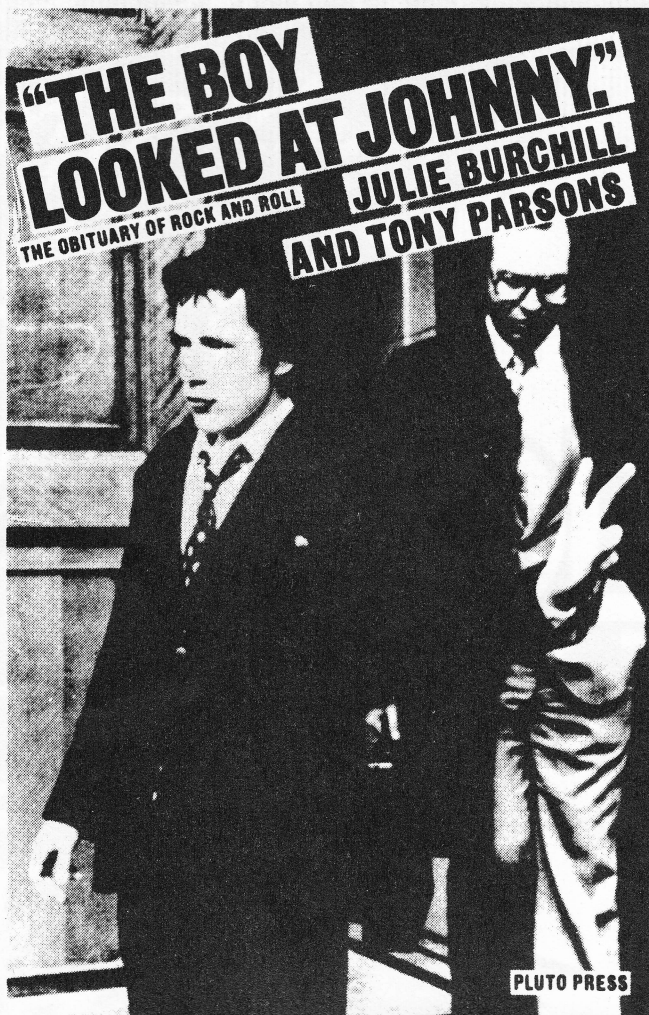
Patti's interesting. Patti on one level, her music is fantastic, but she has no idea of the dialectic of what it is to be a woman. She denies she is a woman.

Doesn't she hate women . . . ?

Yes — that is unfortunate, but that is very true, and she has a very old fashioned way of living her life. She has lots of affairs, but she has a sort of married situation.

What, with Allen Lanier, who's in the biggest machismo group out? (Blue Oyster Cult)

Yeah, yeah. But just Patti's look alone is a great guiding light. I mean I certainly subliminally dyed my hair black because I saw her image as just so fucking incredible. To me, just as long as Patti keeps her mouth shut and just sings, she's just tremendous. On stage she is just an unfreed spirit, unself-conscious, unchained. But . . . unfortunately her private life doesn't square up to her media image — but, so what. Okay. She's the first rock'n'roll woman who is not a victim.



Controversy today is as much the touchstone of mass media journalism as it has ever been.

Simply controversy is a neat package. The key to the publisher's financial aesthetic. It sells so well, and it has the kind of surface veneer that attracts the passerby to turn.

Those who'll succeed best then are those who can best leave a trail of controversy in their wake.

This is just as true for the rock media, which holds the devices of controversy in equal esteem as any sub-division of a Rupert Murdoch empire.

Two such who have succeeded in these terms are Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill. Both were recruited by the NME as fresh blood to bolster the paper's ageing enfant terrible image. The former due to his autobiographical 'The Kids' book, the latter because of an elegiac appraisal of her erstwhile heroine, Patti Smith.

The editorial chose well. In the two years since their arrival they have calculatedly become the paper's bete noirs bar none producing first a gush of hysterical Punk convolutions, full of wild, unstantiable claims, to the now better known, bitter ring of unabatable shred-tearing of anyone and everyone who came within baiting breath of their spitting distance.

Which in a particular light is not a bad thing. Quite the opposie, perhaps. Especially where Burchill is concerned. Her writing has been - with remarkable consistency - a similar desperate attempt at all-out provocation; a verbal equal to the path trodden by the Pistols. Judgement of music to her, no longer involves aesthetic qualities, - here a bourgeoisie rigmorole at most - but clearly a moral and political decision: Talking Heads, to take an example, because of their 'artistic' pretensions, and the elitism implied therein, would be (and were) fairly and squarely lambasted.

In theory, and to some extent in practise too, Burchill could lay some claim to being the most (politically) effective writer to come out of Punk. For every hundred rock fans alienated by her brand of caustic desperation, there may be one who will re-evaluate their own position as consumer within the great rock hypermarket.

All this said, the framework from which she works can be embarrassingly naive, (though innocence be the strongest bearer of change), and also smitten with the need to be a personality, even if only an inverted one.

In her time, Burchill has made for a certain amount of great reading, and correspondingly the two together have not only given NME great copy, their very names have come to ensure it.

Now as either the nexus or nadir of this arrogant personality journalism comes a first book, 'The Boy Looked At Johnny' (Pluto Press, £1.25), which, as the back cover hype says, purports to blow the lid off and out of Punk, 'for the first and last time'.

An obituary they call it.

What is actually contained within the hundred or so pages is as predictable as it is thoroughly depressing. And it only succeeds in blowing the lid off their naive presumptions.

It runs through the same old story of the germs of Punk, the rise of the Pistols, the similar moves to glory via Neal St's Roxy club, of the other groups - The Clash,

The Jam, et al - the 'convoy' as they call it; - and their subsequent sellout of their (at most half baked) ideals; to the corporates; and on to a youth culture.

All this is done in the pair's usual nifty style, mixing venomous put-downs with acerbic wit. No one is spared bar credulously, TRB, X-Ray Spex, & The Runaways (!).

And though they are right - The Clash are, 'rebellion for fun and profit'; The Jam, 'nothing but serenades under Margeret Thatcher's balcony' and on and on and... though is Tom Verlaine really 'an acid babbling Edward Lear'? Dylan more than 'a good but overrated theif'? Their style denies even the slightest knowledge of the word, compassion. Indeed their language of the put-down is so full of arian connotations - judgement by the metre of personal beauty and ugliness, of health versus decay - one can only worry over the implications.

Throughout the book they don't even recognise the effects these groups, as 'Punk', have had on a generation, reintroducing the possibility of a counterculture - which which however romantic a notion can still be one of the strongest dialectical forces within society. After all it was also called the New Wave - and introducing a beleif that they can share and effect change within their environment. Neither do they acknowledge, possibly because they don't realise it's importance, Punk's continuing devolvment and decentralisation. A genuinely potent and very realistic strength, and curbing of power, from the omniscient corporates. And nor do they for a moment suggest that, to many thousands, Punk has introduced, not only excitement where there was boredom, but also Rimbaud, or Burroughs, or the ANL, where before there was only TV and homework.

It is at its most depressing though, in its authors' complete inability to ever move beyond the trivialistic and the titillatory. So Debbie Harry is a junkie, so, so what. 'Politicised' journalism, rock or otherwise, is not just a case of jaded exposing, 'blowing the lid off' subjects, but also an attempt to understand the writer's own, and their subject's political situation in their culture. Tom Robinson may be 'the King', they suggest (and Poly Styrene the Queen...) but nowhere is there any attempt to unravel the contradictions inherent in TRB, and inherent in their statement. In place only bloated, burgeoning, but finally empty praise. The kind of stuff that, once disillusion sweeps in, will be replaced by excessive cynicism because Robinson let their hopes down so completely.

'The Boy Looked At Johnny' is then a sad, fruitless excursion. The book's only real statement, the age old one of the sellout, has been said in so many other places, by so many others, that it here only comes across as spurious and unnecessary. And ironically in style, content and packaging it is exactly the sellout that the text so totally aspires to despise. It's only success lies in the authors' attempts to elicit controversy. That there is nothing more, no recognition of Punk's positive features; and of so much that is going on, and no attempt to answer any of the many questions it so clearly raises, makes it only more irritatingly complete in its failure.

An obituary of sorts, perhaps, then. But of what, or of whom, is the question left to ask.



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